Spaniards and Spanish Product Image among the Chinese: Implications for Marketing Strategies

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This article reports the results of an exploratory study among the Chinese about General Country Attributes (GCA) and General Product Attributes (GPA) in Spain. The objective of the research is to measure the images of the people and the products. Country and product image are important variables that help explain, and can also affect, the consumers' readiness to buy. Having lived in or having visited the target country has a negative influence on the country-of-origin image. Women and young Chinese people share more leniency than men when judging the people and the products.

Introduction

The success of an enterprise in an international environment depends not only on the product or service they manufacture but also on the country of origin itself. The concept of country of origin (COO) started and gained relevance in the early 1960s (Lu & Heslop 2008; Roth & Diamantopoulos 2009). Since then, more than 1000 works have been published about this topic (Papadopoulos 2004) because COO is a large attraction to the researchers (Trotter & Wang 2012).

A specific example of how the COO strategies can be applied is shown in the case of the Spanish brand Flamenco Chic, which sells clothing and accessories for women. When they started to export to the USA, their importer asked them to always include the 'Made in Spain' or 'Designed in Spain' labels in their products because the USA market looks favorably on the Spanish fashion. Other examples have been reviewed in several

studies (Roth & Diamantopoulos 2009). Hence, COO seems to be an important informational cue to enhance marketing success abroad.

With globalization, and thanks to the mass media and the Internet, countries, no matter how far apart they may be, are present in the lives of the people. So people have their own view and image of a country through external influences (D'Astous & Boujbel 2006). It must also be highlighted that COO has an influence on the quality perception of a product (Bilkey & Ness 1982) as well as on the image of the country. The consumers tend to evaluate the products depending on that image or perception (Liu & Johnson 2005).

So far there is no consensus in the different studies carried out regarding the importance of COO (Bhaskaran & Sukumuran 2007). Some of these studies conclude that COO has an influence on the consumers and represents a sustainable competitive advantage (Baker & Ballington 2002), while others seem to confirm that it does not (Bhaskaran & Sukumuran 2007).

Among the skeptics of COO, some have concluded that several other factors influence the consumers more strongly than the COO cues (Bhaskaran & Sukumuran 2007). However, not taking into consideration the effect of COO, due to the fact that some researchers have denied its effect, may represent a strategic failure (Baker & Ballington 2002).

Other researchers explain the effects of COO as part of a psychological process, likening it to a halo model (Han 1989). This psychological process has an influence on the consumers, especially in the case of those with no direct personal experience of having lived in or visited a foreign country.

Although we live in the age of globalization, this does not necessarily lead to homogenizing consumer behavior (De Mooj & Hosftede 2002). Thus, the consumer behavior turns cross-cultural, and becomes more and more heterogeneous (Wang 2012). From a management perspective, it is important for the companies to realize that the markets today are worldwide and cross-cultural. To be aware of and sensitive to the cultural differences is a significant factor for success in the world marketplace. Failure to put marketing strategy in a cross-cultural context of the countries where a company is doing business will work to the detriment of the brands and the business relationships (Tian & Trotter 2012).

Research Objectives

COO is not only an important informational cue for businesses but also for public policy (Lampers & Jaffe 1997; Roth & Diamantopoulos 2009).

Governments should promote the image of the domestic made products as well as that of the people in particular, when one of the main sources of revenue of the country rests on tourism. Place image is the main goal for the countries that desire to be positioned well in international relations, more so in the case of the new emerging markets (Papadopoulos 2004). The COO traits in a country turn it into a brand name (Lu & Heslop 2008).

Accordingly, Spain spent about 42 million euros in 2010 on COO promotion, plus 7.5 million euros on launching a campaign to create its identity logo. The aim of this campaign was not only to consolidate its image as a traditional tourist destination, already well established in some European countries, but also to attract new potential markets, such as China.

In this case, Spain was trying to sell the country of origin as a brand name and thus influence other Spanish brands as well. When a country promotes some stereotypes, these stereotypes yield an automatic influence on COO, which may be positive or negative (Ishii 2009; Liu & Johnson 2005). Consequently, the consumers collate all this information to react positively or negatively when choosing a brand.

A recent study of the image of Spain in China (Laso & Justo 2008) has highlighted that Spain is relatively unknown in China, even though it is seen in a favorable light when it comes to its perceived image. Most of this work focuses on identifying the spontaneous stereotypes about Spain among the Chinese; for example, the soccer celebrities, the renowned Spanish brands, the bulls, and the flamenco.

With the advent of globalization, there is a new trend in workforce mobility, and people are more likely to move to another country for long periods of time. The countries, in general, do not see that this may bring about a cross-national effect on the consumers' view of the host countries as well as the countries of origin, and its potential to spread the COO image. This may even lead to establishing a new model stemming from the foreign consumers living in another country.

The article focuses on the influence of COO on the Spanish products and Spanish people among the Chinese. Although the figures for the Chinese immigrants to Spain are not high (a 2007 survey on immigration carried out by Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) showed that Chinese immigration to Spain represented only 1.2% of the total, as compared to 39% of immigrants from Central and South America, mainly due to historical and language differences), the potential of that country as a market makes a study of that target population really worth its while. Moreover, there are more and more Chinese students who are pursuing their studies abroad (Kotler 2010; Lantos 2011; Yang 2012).

Although it is acknowledged that COO plays an important role, literature has not taken into account the different perceptions the consumers have due to their direct contact with a country. The present study addresses this gap and tries to identify the influence of COO, not only on the foreign countries and the people but also on those groups who have had an exposure to the COO. Thus, the studied groups are broken into four categories: those living in the country at present, those who have lived in or visited Spain, those with no direct contact with Spain, and an additional group of second-generation Chinese.

Second-generation Chinese is an experimental group, added to this paper after interviews with a focus group of four people, where the differences between China and Spain were examined. In the course of our work in this focus group, we realized that the second-generation Chinese are seen as foreigners by the Spaniards as well as by the Chinese. Moreover, the second-generation Chinese have had an upbringing based on strict Chinese traditions, although they have lived all their lives in Spain and have received the same education as any other Spanish student. Thus, this group could provide valuable insight into the features of image creation of a country based on the family environment, as opposed to the culture of the country they grew up in. This study tries to find out whether the second-generation Chinese behave differently as an out-group member and similarly within an ascribed in-group (Sun, *et al*. 2004).

Among the five cultural dimensions of Hofstede (2001), we place special emphasis on Individualism (IDV) and Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI). People from collectivist cultures tend to evaluate the other countries better than those from individualist cultures, and people from uncertainty accepting cultures are more tolerant. In fact, the Chinese have the lowest ranking in IDV and also a rather low ranking in UAI. Therefore, it is expected that the results will show an IDV and a UAI dimension that would correlate with the trend in the Chinese culture. These traits should also be noticeable in the second-generation Chinese, and their opinion should reflect a trend equal to that of their family, as they come from a collectivist culture.

Methodology Issues

Measures

This study is divided into two facets: General Country Attributes (GCA) and General Product Attributes (GPA), based on Parameswaran & Pisharodi (1994), and also tested by Pereira, *et al*. (2002). GCA measures

a person's attitude toward the people of another country in which a product has been produced, while GPA measures a person's evaluation of some positive aspects of the products made in another country.

All the variables were measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Both GCA and GPA were measured using eight items each. GCA has a standardized alpha of 0.811, and GPA has an alpha of 0.862. The Cronbach alphas obtained from this study indicate good reliability for all the scales used. Thus, this confirmed again the validity of the facets addressed by Parameswaran & Pisharodi (1994).

Demographic Variables

According to Bilkey & Ness (1982), women, older people, and people with higher education rated the foreign products more highly than the males, younger people, and people with limited education. This article takes into consideration these demographic variables.

Data Collection

The data were collected in two countries: Spain (Navarre, Aragon, Catalonia) and China (Beijing, Wuhan, Shanghai, Qintian, Tianjin). The whole sample includes 158 usable responses, divided into four groups: those living in the country at present, those who have lived in or visited Spain, those with no direct contact with Spain, and an additional group of second-generation Chinese.

The sample population composed 65.8 percent female and 34.2 percent male. As far as age is concerned, 70.3 percent were under 25, and 29.7 percent between 25 and 44. In terms of the education level, 5.1 percent had received a junior high education or below, 8.9 percent had graduated from senior high school, and 86.1 percent had graduated from the university.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire based on the scales of Parameswaran & Pisharodi (1994) was originally drafted in Spanish and then translated into Mandarin. A pre-test was conducted in Pamplona by the Chinese teachers to determine whether the questionnaire items in Mandarin were conceptually equivalent to the questionnaire items in Spanish, and to confirm the understandability of the questionnaire.

Methodology

The collected data are metric. Identifiers are nominal information. The appropriate statistical method in this case is factor analysis, projecting on the axes the variables identifying the elements of the sample. This method is technically sound, and it will provide the relevant variables, if found, used for measuring the image of the Spaniards and their products, linking them with the sample characteristics. Computer output is shown in the next paragraphs: the eigenvalues, the variable-factor correlations, and the test values of the characterizing variables, such as age, gender, reason to visit Spain, and knowledge of the country.

Data Analysis

The results are as follows:

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the variables taken into consideration for measuring the image of the Spaniards in the Chinese sample group. It also displays some basic statistics. The variable 'Friendly' scores the highest and 'Hard-working' the lowest. Friendliness was a spontaneous stereotype that was very relevant and showed a high score (Laso & Justo 2009). The other better evaluated dimensions are 'High life level' and 'Artistic'. Attributes such as 'Technical skills', 'Creative', and 'Raised standard of living' are rated lower.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Continuous Variables

Label variable	Count	Weight	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Friendly	158	158.00	3.981	0.791	2.000	5.000
Artistic	158	158.00	3.576	0.798	1.000	5.000
Creative	158	158.00	3.184	0.753	2.000	5.000
Polite	158	158.00	3.367	0.903	1.000	5.000
Hard-working	158	158.00	2.772	0.913	1.000	5.000
High life level	158	158.00	3.728	0.952	1.000	5.000
Raised standard of living	158	158.00	3.196	0.958	1.000	5.000
Technical skills	158	158.00	3.108	0.760	1.000	5.000

The principal component analysis provides the following results. **Table 2** displays the calculated eigenvalues. Only the first and the second values are high enough to draw relevant conclusions because their

magnitudes are over one. Both the axes explain roughly 60 % of the information provided by the sample.

Table 2: Control Panel of Eigenvalues (Trace of matrix: 8.00000)

Number	Eigenvalue	Percentage	Cumulated Percentage
1	35.551	44.44	44.44
2	12.310	15.39	59.83
3	0.7598	9.50	69.32
4	0.6269	7.84	77.16
5	0.5561	6.95	84.11
6	0.5288	6.61	90.72
7	0.3821	4.78	95.50
8	0.3603	4.50	100.00

Table 3 that follows displays the correlation coefficients between the axes and the variables on the five obtained axes. The first one is remarkably informative because the correlations are relevant, and all of them have the same signs ─ positive; so all the variables are located and projected on the right side of Axis 1.

This must be understood as showing that some groups in the sample rate the Spaniards as above average, as such groups are located on the positive side of the axis. If they were not, that would have meant that they rated the Spaniards lower than the average. The observer must only draw conclusions in the cases when the test-values (p-values) are over 1.96. In other words, if the test-values are over 1.96, the confidence of the variables as regards their relevance is over 95 %.

An analysis of **Table 3** and **Table 4** leads us to conclude that the Chinese men, those who know Spain and those who have visited the country for study reasons, have a worse image of the Spaniards than the women and those who have never visited the country. Other variables depicting the respondents are irrelevant. This means that their valuations do not differ from the average of the values provided by the whole sample.

The second axis reflects the artistic and creative capabilities of the Spaniards. Those who do not know Spain, score these two variables higher than average; there are no differences between the gender values. Those who know Spain rate these two variables below the average value estimated, considering the whole sample of respondents.

Table 3: Active Variable-Factor Correlation

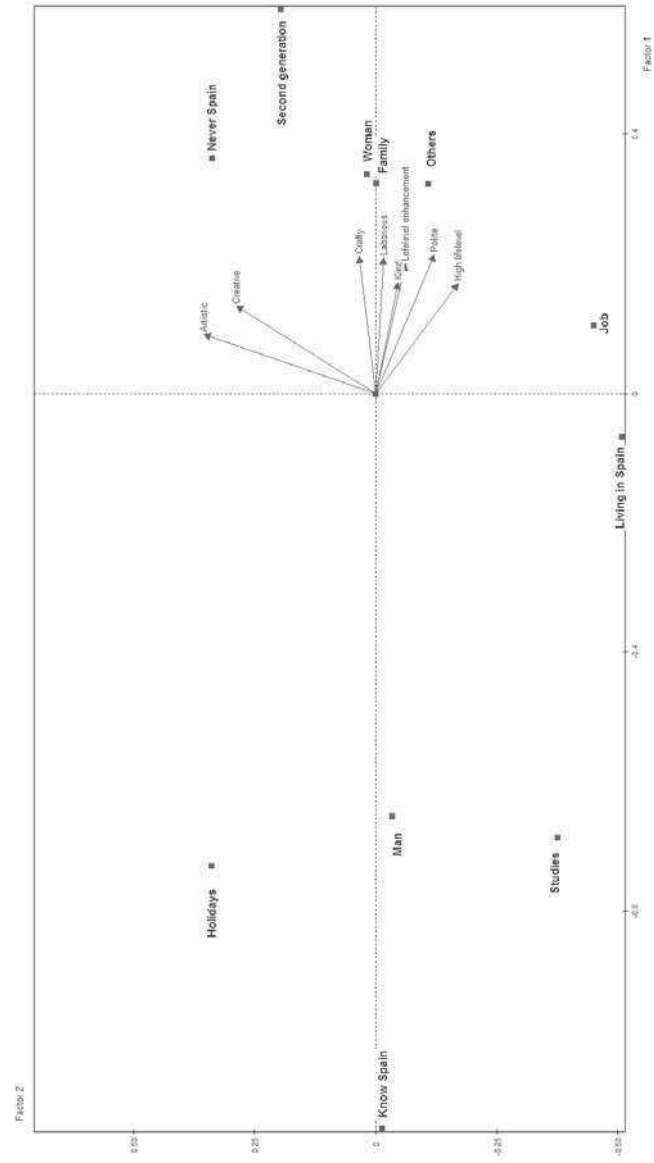
Label variable	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4	Axis 5
Friendly	0.64	-0.10	-0.67	0.04	-0.28
Artistic	0.34	0.77	-0.26	0.12	0.43
Creative	0.50	0.63	0.29	0.22	-0.41
Polite	0.79	-0.26	-0.16	0.00	0.11
Hard-working	0.78	-0.04	0.13	-0.24	-0.04
High life level	0.63	-0.37	0.18	0.61	0.07
Raised standard of living	0.74	-0.13	0.24	-0.14	0.30
Technical skills	0.78	0.07	0.14	-0.35	-0.11

Table 4 Test-values of Supplementary Categories

Label	Count	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4	Axis 5
Group						
Living in Spain	50	-0.30	-3.92	-3.99	-1.29	1.07
Second generation	13	1.18	0.66	0.45	1.17	-1.70
Know Spain	26	-3.35	-0.07	-0.33	0.50	-0.66
Never Spain	69	2.13	3.36	3.74	0.19	0.43
Gender						
Man	54	-3.13	-0.28	0.32	0.15	-0.39
Woman	104	3.13	0.28	-0.32	-0.15	0.39
Reasons						
Studies	46	-2.92	-2.72	-2.62	1.52	0.65
Job	15	0.23	-1.65	-1.39	-2.09	0.45
Family	19	0.80	-0.01	-0.82	0.55	-1.24
Holidays	4	-0.78	0.62	1.04	-1.04	-1.35
Others	5	0.39	-0.22	-0.89	-1.06	-0.13

The following **Chart 1** displays the results. Respondent identifiers, such as second-generation in Spain, or reasons to visit the country (holidays or other), appear in the chart because they have a computed coordinate, but their test-values (p-vales) are negligible to draw any relevant

Chart 1: Factors 1 and 2 in Spaniards Valuation



relevant conclusion or practical consequences. Remember that the test values below 1.96 (95 % of confidence) mean that the corresponding identifier is irrelevant in such analyses.

Product image can be different among the members of a sample. **Table 5** displays some basic statistics. The attributes of the better valued Spanish products are prestige, appeal, and quality. In the study of Laso & Justo (2009), the first brand in spontaneous stereotypes was Zara, the most famous fashion retail Spanish company in the world. The strategy of this company in China is to sell Zara as a prestigious company. The worst valued attribute is price, but there are hardly any differences among the other attributes.

Table 5: Summary Statistics of Continuous Variables

Label variable	Count	Weight	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Well made	158	158.00	3.633	0.678	2.000	5.000
Long lasting	158	158.00	3.551	0.680	2.000	5.000
Prestigious	158	158.00	3.867	0.908	2.000	5.000
Quality	158	158.00	3.715	0.721	2.000	5.000
High technology	158	158.00	3.487	0.847	1.000	5.000
Appealing	158	158.00	3.709	0.821	2.000	5.000
Performance	158	158.00	3.462	0.869	1.000	5.000
Good price	158	158.00	3.171	0.781	1.000	5.000

The routine in understanding the results provided by the principal component analysis leads one to conclude that Axis 1 collects 52% of the information; the other axes reveal little information because of their negligible eigenvalues. (See **Table 6**)

As depicted previously, the variable-factor correlations are high only on Axis 1, and they show positive signs. The variables rating the products are located on the right side of Axis 1. (See **Table 7**)

Table 6: Control Panel of Eigenvalues (Trace of matrix: 8.00000)

Number	Eigenvalue	Percentage	Cumulated Percentage
1	41.625	52.03	52.03
2	0.9857	12.32	64.35
3	0.7371	9.21	73.57
4	0.6059	7.57	81.14
5	0.4851	6.06	87.20
6	0.4144	5.18	92.38
7	0.3187	3.98	96.37
8	0.2906	3.63	100.00

Table 7: Active Variable-Factor Correlation

Label variable	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4	Axis 5
Well made	0.78	0.27	-0.24	-0.13	0.21
Long lasting	0.72	0.48	-0.25	-0.18	0.11
Prestigious	0.79	-0.32	-0.19	-0.06	-0.25
Quality	0.80	0.17	-0.10	0.12	-0.11
High technology	0.63	-0.53	0.22	-0.19	0.46
Appealing	0.76	-0.33	0.05	-0.19	-0.35
Performance	0.70	-0.10	0.02	0.68	0.09
Good price	0.55	0.38	0.72	-0.05	-0.09

Table 8 that follows displays the test values for the identifiers. In this case, the results change. Education level is a relevant variable in product valuation. The Chinese with university level studies and people up to 25 years of age value the Spanish products higher than average. (See **Chart 2**) The demographic variable representing the people with higher education and the females, confirms those groups as the ones who rate the foreign products more highly (Bilkey & Ness 1982). However, and contrary to what was expected, people over 25 years of age value the Spanish products lower than the average. Men showed the expected results.

Table 8 Test-values of Supplementary Categories

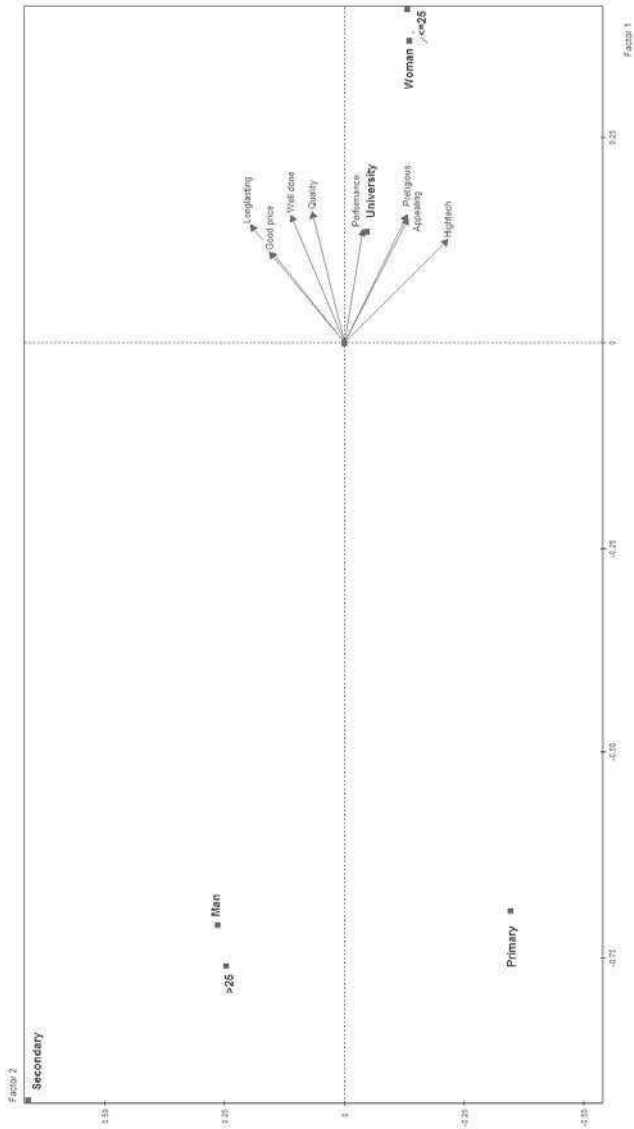
Label	Count	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3	Axis 4	Axis 5
Age interval						
<=25	103	3.41	-2.27	-1.99	0.91	1.05
>25	55	-3.41	2.27	1.99	-0.91	-1.05
Gender						
Man	54	-3.14	2.40	0.26	1.48	1.91
Woman	104	3.14	-2.40	-0.26	-1.48	-1.91
Education level						
Primary	8	-0.98	-1.02	-0.49	0.66	-0.15
Secondary	14	-1.77	2.60	-0.09	1.66	-0.57
University	136	2.07	-1.49	0.38	-1.77	0.56

Managerial Insights

Our research gives the managers and the governments a comprehensive view of what the market orientation for COO should be like, ways to achieve it, and its likely consequences. COO should represent a competitive advantage in the economies that depend on external revenue, such as from tourism, or those that want to open new markets or want to attract foreign investments in their own country.

The findings mentioned above suggest that a halo effect is to be taken into account. There may be a positive prejudice in favor of Spain and its products, apparently due to the collectivist culture of China. However, after visiting the country, this positive image decreases in value as it seems that COO does not live up to the expectations. This feeling is not beneficial for Spain and its products. This disappointing experience can have a negative impact on the willingness to import the Spanish products. It can also affect the prospects of opening new businesses in Spain and, as a consequence, on the employment of the local workers. Besides, a decrease in the number of Chinese tourists choosing Spain as their holiday destination can also be expected.

Chart 2: Factors 1 and 2 in Product Valuation



Politicians and economic groups interested in maintaining economic relationships with China should do their best to build a better image of Spain, not only outside but also inside the same country. Not only the politicians and the economic groups but also the organizations need to align their brands with the culture of their target markets (Handley, *et al*. 2013). Emotional advertisements could be a good way to promote the image of Spain (Chaoying, et al. 2011); they are more effective in the case of the Chinese.

The promotion of COO has to be a cooperative effort between the public and the private sectors, and must show an awareness of the cultural differences (Tian & Borges 2011). It should foster a common agreement to find a marketing policy that takes into account the internal and external factors. Emery & Tian (2010) advised that the effectiveness of advertising appeals can be affected by factors such as age, societal trends, product usage, and political-legal environment.

In order to achieve this goal, we suggest launching product fairs and exhibitions, advertising to promote the high standards of quality of the Spanish products, and creating awareness of consumer rights, regulations, and safety. As changing the COO image takes a long time and takes place in small steps, remedial action should be taken as soon as possible.

Final Conclusion

This research has measured the image of the Spanish products and the Spaniards among the Chinese people. Despite the small sample size, some relevant conclusions can be drawn. The results present the evidence that the women, the younger Chinese, and those who have never visited Spain value the Spanish products and Spaniards better.

Women give higher value than men in surveys that deal with quality, satisfaction, or image. (It may be that their judgments are more accurate.) Hence, women as a demographic variable are again confirmed as a group who rate the foreign products more highly (Bilkey & Ness 1982). However, another demographic variable, the group of younger Chinese, who theoretically were supposed to be more critical of COO, appears more enthusiastic than the older people. This new variable should be taken into consideration for future research. It is also worth studying whether the so-called ‘young people group’ has developed other perceptions, different from the ones shown in the first studies on COO carried out some years ago, and confirm the results of our survey.

The second-generation Chinese seem to be a group not influenced by the family environment of the group living in Spain, because collectivism

as a variable of influence has no relevance according to the results of the survey. However, further studies are considered necessary to confirm these results, given that the sample study group was small.

But what really matters is that the image of Spain for those who never have been to Spain is better than that of those who know the country. The findings of this study prove that personal experience, no matter the reason (holidays, studies, family), has a negative impact on the people. The Chinese who have never been to Spain have an opinion influenced by affective components. This affective dimension (emotions), after a direct contact with the country, turns into a cognitive dimension (beliefs) which prevails and has a negative impact on the COO image. This two-component view of attitudes was developed in different studies like Roth & Diamantopoulos (2009) and seems to enhance the need for a framework for different models.

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